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A guide to the Spanish Plays collection

Spanish plays of the Golden Age

In 16th and 17th century Spain theatre was a popular entertainment in every respect. Plays were often staged by travelling troupes of actors in the *corrales* or courtyards of inns and communal dwellings. These dwellings, known in Madrid as *corralas*, were several stories high and built around a central patio where a temporary stage would be set up.

In later years, permanent stages were built in these patios or entire playhouses were erected, often in town squares, replicating the structure of the *corrala*. These purpose-built playhouses were thereafter known as *corrales de comedia*.



The *corrales* lacked toilets, did not have a maximum standing capacity and were often very crowded. Almost all disappeared with their prohibition at the end of the 18th century and were replaced with the safer and more sanitary modern theatres.

The popular character of Spanish theatre at this time is also evident in the way plays were distributed from the 17th century onwards. There were two very different methods and formats:

Partes. Predominantly a 17th century development, these were sets of volumes made up of 12 plays; some comprise works by a single playwright, but many are compilations from different authors. The separate plays in the *partes* were sometimes also sold individually as *desglosadas* (unbound). *Partes* were often edited by the authors themselves and are usually the most faithful reproductions of the original texts of plays.

Sueltas (loose). A uniquely Spanish phenomenon, these were plays printed separately and intended to be sold individually. They were meant for public consumption and not intended to last. As an ephemeral, inexpensive product, they were often printed on 4 or 5 quarto gatherings of poor quality paper using worn type.

The text was often abridged and sometimes the type size changed halfway through the pamphlet in order to fit the paper. The printing of *sueltas* began in the 17th century and continued well into the 19th century, but the term usually refers only to Golden Age plays. An estimated 8,000 *comedias sueltas*, often with the words *comedia famosa* in the title, were printed in up to 5 different editions, resulting in some 40,000 editions with impressions of 1,200 to 1,500 copies per edition.

Extent

The London Library houses one of the largest collections of Spanish plays in Britain. There are more than 1,500 editions. The majority are bound together into over 100 pamphlet volumes numbered P901 to P1000, P1050-57, P1120 and P1353, with one box, numbered P1121, of loose plays. Other volumes of plays are shelved with the Antiquarian books collection.



Provenance

The majority of the editions, bound into some 70 volumes, were donated to the Library by the poet and scholar of Spanish literature John Rutter Chorley (1807–67), best remembered as a champion of the works of Lope de Vega when the latter was distinctly unfashionable. A friend of Thomas Carlyle, he had a particular interest in Early-Modern Spanish drama and bequeathed the greater part of the huge collection he had amassed to the British Library, where they form the core of that

institution's *comedia* holdings. Some of J.R. Chorley's volumes bear the stamp of the Libreria Colonna, the private library of the noble and powerful Colonna family of Rome.

A further 15 volumes were presented to the London Library in May 1892 by Mrs G.H. Dawkins and come from the smaller, though still impressive collection of John Rutter's brother, William Brownsword Chorley (before 1807–before 1866?), whose library of over 1,000 Spanish items was sold at Sotheby's, 21–24 October 1846, although we cannot be sure that she acquired her collection at this auction. The British Library, however, is documented as having bought some items at this sale so the Chorley brothers' collections are now divided between these two institutions.

Two volumes have the bookplate of Henry Eyre Esq., who may have been another bidder at the Sotheby's sale of W.B. Chorley's collection.

Genres

During this period performances typically lasted between four and six hours and would consist of a three-act play and various interludes. This was the typical running order:

1. *Loa* (brief verse composition)
2. *Primera jornada* (act one)
3. *Entremés* (an interlude consisting of a one-act humorous play), later replaced by the farcical *sainete*
4. *Segunda jornada* (act two)
5. *Jácara* or *mojiganga* (brief satirical songs or poems)
6. *Tercera jornada* (act three)
7. *Baile* (dance)

The collection reflects this mix of genres and contains printed editions of a wide variety of different kinds of play, including pastorals, the one-act religious pieces known in Spanish as *autos sacramentales*, other religious dramas, and full-length comedies, tragedies, and tragicomedies (although in practice, all plays, except for the *autos*, were commonly referred to as *comedias* regardless of their genre). It also includes many *loas*, *entremeses*, *bailes*, *sainetes* and examples of the other minor poetic and musical genres associated with the great age of the Spanish stage such as *villancicos* and *tonadillas*.

Formats

There are many *sueñas* in the collection as well as volumes of *partes* devoted to the works of a single author such as Lope de Vega (1562–1635) or Agustín Moreto y Cabaña (1618–69). Other *partes* bring together in a single volume editions from a particular period (that period being described in Spanish on the cover/spine as the ‘Age of Lope’, the ‘Age of Calderón’, or the ‘Decline and Fall of the National Drama’). In addition, there are many *desglosadas*, most of which appear to belong to the series *Comedias escogidas*, printed between 1652 and 1704.

Authors

The collection includes works by nearly 300 different playwrights, as well as many anonymous ones. The vast majority are original pieces by most of the leading figures of Spanish Golden Age theatre:

- Antonio Mira de Amescua, 1574?–1644 (42)
- Luis Vélez de Guevara, 1579–1644 (47)
- Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza, 1580–1639 (32)
- Luis de Belmonte y Bermúdez, 1587?–1650? (25)
- Jerónimo de Cáncer y Velasco, c. 1594–1654 (23)
- Álvaro Cubillo de Aragón, 1596?–1661 (34)
- Antonio Enríquez Gómez, 1600–1663 (20, plus a further 32, writing as Fernando de Zárata)
- Juan Pérez de Montalván, 1602–1638 (62)
- Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla, 1607–1648 (67)
- Juan de Matos Frago, 1608–1689 (74)
- Antonio de Solís, 1610–1686 (24)
- Juan de Zabaleta, c. 1610–c. 1670 (15)
- Cristóbal de Monroy y Silva, 1612–1649 (40)
- Antonio Martínez de Meneses, c. 1612–1661 (35)
- Moreto (142)
- Diego Figueroa y Córdoba, 1619–1673, and his brother José (25)

- Juan Bautista Diamante, 1625–87 (37)
- Agustín de Salazar y Torres, 1642–1675 (20)
- Francisco Antonio de Bances Candamo, 1662-1709? (40)
- José de Cañizares, 1676–1750 (50)
- Ramón de la Cruz, 1731–94 (65).

Of particular interest to researchers will be the holdings of Lope (c. 100), Calderón de la Barca, 1600-1681 (180), and Tirso de Molina, 1583–1648 (51). The collection is particularly rich in rare eighteenth-century Lope *sueatas*.

There are also plays by authors better known for their work in other genres. Examples of this are the picaresque play starring the legendary rogue *Pedro de Urdemalas*, attributed to Cervantes among others, and two pieces by the famous essayist, jurist and politician Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744-1811): the comedy *El Delincuente Honrado* (The Honest Delinquent) and the tragedy *Munuzas*.

The collection also provides evidence for a certain taste among the Spanish audience from the late 18th century onwards for the work of foreign authors in the form of translations and/or adaptations of French, Italian and British plays:

- Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–1799) – a translation by Domingo Botti of *Les Deux Amis ou Le Négociant de Lyon* printed in Barcelona, undated probably 19th century
- Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Choudard-Desforges (1746–1806) – an adaptation of *Le Sourd, ou L'Auberge Pleine*, printed in Valencia in 1816
- Shakespeare – a Spanish translation of a French version of *Othello* by Jean-François Ducis printed in Valencia 1821
- Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793) – verse adaptations of the prose plays *Pamela Maritata* and *Pamela Fanciulla* both of which were printed in Valencia and Madrid in 1796, and a prose translation of *Pamela Fanciulla* printed in Barcelona, undated
- Pietro Antonio Domenico Bonaventura Trapassi 'Metastasio' (1698 -1782) – an adaptation of *La Nitteti* printed in Valencia in 1772
- Philippe Néricault Destouches (1680–1754) – an adaptation of *Philosophe Marié* printed in Madrid in 1795
- Voltaire (1694–1778) – a translation of *Tancredi* printed in Barcelona in 1798

Date range

Over 1000 of the pieces are undated and many give no place of printing. The earliest of the dated editions is *La Rueda de la Fortuna* (complete with its *loa* and ‘*Bayle*’, ‘*curioso y grave*’) of ‘el Doctor Mira de Mescua’, taken from the *Quinta Parte* of the *Flor de las Comedias de España, de Diferentes Autores* (Barcelona: Sebastián de Cormellas, 1616), where it was originally item [11]; the latest are two pieces from 1849: Manuel Tamayo y Baus’s four-act drama, *El 5 de agosto*, played that year in Madrid’s Teatro de la Cruz, and Rafael Gálvez Almandi’s five-act historical drama on Spain’s national hero, Rodrigo (Ruy) Díaz de Vivar (d.1099), generally known as ‘El Cid’:

Para heridas, las de honor, played in the Teatro del Príncipe (both printed at Madrid by the widow of R.J. Domínguez). (Several pieces, especially those from the late 17th century and early 18th, include an indication of the place of performance and/or the acting company, the latter sometimes defraying the costs of part or all of the edition.)

Dates have been suggested or attributed for many of the undated plays and as a result over 80% of the collection (ca. 1,200 plays) can be dated. Around 275 of the plays were printed in the 17th century, 160 were printed in the first half of the 18th century with the majority, nearly 600, dating from the second half. A further 160 were printed in the 19th century.

Printing

The collection includes examples from most of the major centres of printing and dramatic activity – Madrid (c. 700), Valencia (c. 400), Barcelona (c. 150), Seville (c. 150) – as well as editions printed elsewhere in the Peninsula (Salamanca, Valladolid, Saragossa, Alcalá de Henares, Pamplona, Burgos, Granada, Lisbon) and one edition each from Cologne, Vienna, and Lima.

The plays were printed by over 170 workshops. Particularly well represented are the printing houses of Antonio Sanz and his heirs (Madrid, 1729–1785: more than 200 editions), the Orga family of Jose(ph), T(h)omas and their descendants (Valencia, 1761–1796: c. 300), and Manuel Quiroga and his heirs (Madrid, 1790–1825: also c. 300), but other, earlier, well-known printers also figure, among them Mateo de la Bastida (Madrid, 1652–62: 18 editions), Melchor Sánchez (Madrid, 1653–61: 53), and Jose(ph) Fernández de Buendía (Madrid, 1663–79: 21). There are multiple copies of several pieces, occasionally of different states and thus allowing for easy collation/comparison, the study of variants being one area of Spanish drama studies that has recently proved fruitful (e.g. P945–7, P950–7, and P960–10, all of the 1803 Valencia edition by Jose(ph) de Orga of Cándido María Trigueros’s *refundición* of Lope’s *La moza de cántaro*; likewise P980–10, P965–8, and P1121–[6]: the anonymous *La muger de Peribáñez*, a Lope sequel described as being ‘Por Tres Ingenios’).

Rare editions

There are some rare examples of editions not identifiable with holdings elsewhere, such as *Los Médicis de Florencia* by Diego Jiménez de Enciso, possibly published in Cologne in 1697 (London Library pamphlet no. 968, item 17) and a copy of *Quién hallará mujer fuerte* (Who will find a strong woman) by Calderón de la Barca, possibly published in Madrid in 1677 (London Library pamphlet no. 1056, item 8). The rarest edition is one entitled *La adúltera virtuosa* (The virtuous adulteress in London Library pamphlet no. 996, item 9) by Antonio Mira de Amescua of which only one other copy is known to exist (Munich Staatsbibliothek, Rar. 711).



Significance

The collection is a valuable source for those researching the long neglected and now internationally fashionable 'minor genres' of the classical drama of Spain's Golden Age. It is also an invaluable repository of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reissues of works by the man now once again acknowledged as Spain's greatest dramatist, Lope de Vega.

Students of Spanish printing, of the history of the leading playhouses of Spain's larger cities, of the relationship of play publishing to professional and

amateur performance and to recreational reading, and of the shifting reputations of dramatists until recently dismissed as second-rate imitators of the Lopean model will find the pamphlets of inestimable value.

A complete list of the plays can be found in:

Gregg, Karl C. *An Index to the Spanish Theatre Collection in The London Library*. Charlottesville, Virginia: Biblioteca Siglo de Oro, 1984 [The Library has a loan copy shelved at Bibliog., Drama (on 5th floor), and a reference copy is available on request at the Issue Desk.]

Hagberg Wright, C.T. and Purnell, C.J. *Catalogue of The London Library, St. James's Square, London*. London: The London Library, 1914. Vol. II, pp. 969-981

The contents of the various pamphlet volumes are detailed in the Library's Guard Book catalogues (red leather-bound) in the Catalogue Hall, in volume number 33, under 'Spanish Plays'.

All pamphlet volumes and boxes may be consulted onsite by Library members or temporary pass-holders but please give at least 72 hours' notice.